

Vol. 18/No. 2

Jan/Feb 1998

# RELIGION **POWER**

*Fantasy*

# REBIRTH

Science

*Culture*

# HORROR

U S I O N

## Science Fiction & The Discourse of the *Other*

# Brave New Age!

From the Editor

**Molly Hankwitz**

Writer/Artist  
San Francisco, CA

IT WAS AT THE TURN OF THE TWENTIETH century that the modernist architect Adolph Loos pointed to the blurring of “reality” and “illusion” which characterized decadent Vienna with a social critique directed at the disguising of an ashtray as a pistol or a pistol as an ashtray. Excessive ornament, or the representation of decadent fantasy through the excessive use of ornament, were, in his words, “a crime.”

Jack Kupstein's Felix the Cat cartoon *Astronomeow* depicts the famous feline trickster of early television involved in a utopian fantasy of reproduction in which literally hundreds of clone-Felixes are created simultaneously to invade and take over a distant planet. From the simplest comix to Hollywood features, science fiction film is a particularly First World genre. ‘We’ (the ‘we’ here is deliberately “universal”) are the travelers and the inventors. ‘We’ are at risk of being harmed by an Evil Other even as we are in the process of invading or harming. The American romance with military power and space *qua* frontier is apparent in advertising, food, media and Hollywood heroes, fashion and design. These perspectives influence consciousness. And there are new forms, like the upsurge of New Age religiosity sold over-the-counter in multiple forms: books, movies, radio talk shows, CD-ROMs and home

videos, here for the year 2000 AD.

Speculations and explanations, religious or otherwise, increase in a culture of unknowns (read: the future). *Just what is and who is the corporate technocracy? What is IT—the next millennium—going to be like? Who is in control?*

History is a  
stream of  
conscious  
fictions

The New York Times ran a feature on the new market of products touting the presence of Angels, Aliens, Visions and New Age Mysticism. It struck me in reading as particularly ironic that in a country where

hallucinogenic drugs are illegal, it's okay to sell and promote tales of abductions and visions of purple angels—especially if one has a connection to God. One thinks of soothsaying quacks selling two-dollar bottles of all-purpose elixir to the unsuspecting.

Is it human and historical? There's an answer. Is it a human knee-jerk response to the approach of a new age (read: century)? Maybe. We've already lived through what some critics have called the Age of Anxiety. And now we have increased technocracy, a shrinking planet, and the turn of the century to provide fertile ground for speculation—the sort of raw stuff upon which science fiction has notoriously been wrought. Scarcity, doom, promise of better worlds, projections of the Other, fascination with space travel, religious queries, the coming of gods, higher intelligence to save humanoids from our own destruction; these are utopia's and dystopia's oldest themes.

In October 1996 I co-curated a symposium entitled *Mapping Intelligence: A Symposium on Outer Space* with Four Walls gallery. We came together around a mutual interest in provoking artists, scientists, and religious thinkers. Space exploration, travel, science fiction and extraterrestrial contact are male-created (men in power laying claims to the frontier of the universe). We brought together thought and art; introduced gender to the role-governing picture.

The symposium ran against the prevailing war-like themes of conflict in popular science fiction: those which perennially pose a group of heroic guys who are Good (read: white, usually in uniform, on a romantic, scientific trip; or an heroic male/female couple, see: Spielberg's *Gremlins*) against some Evil force (read: Amazons, little green men in saucers who don't speak our language, or giant oversized insects or animals) and which inevitably result in the protection of the First World way (read: a federation ship, suburban Christmas [see: *Gremlins*] or a philosophical right to kill instead of communicate [see: *Gremlins*, in which “the couple” lure “the invaders”—based on racist caricatures of inner city

**Hankwitz:** Page 4

## Nano and Mega Design

Wednesday, January 14, 7:30PM  
McBean Theater, The Exploratorium  
3601 Lyon St., San Francisco  
(Contact: Trudy Myrrh Reagan, (650) 856-9593.)

**Charles Ostman**, author and Senior Fellow at the Institute for Global Futures, is Science Editor for *Mondo 2000*. Ostman will explore with us the art of the minuscule. His research at Lawrence Berkeley Lab in miniaturization has led him into nanotechnology, the ability to make things one atom at a time. He sees many stupendous implications for society when this becomes commonplace. As an artist in virtual reality, he is enraptured by the ability to visualize otherwise 'impossible' views into synthetic environments. He makes algorithms for natural patterns, but once those patterns have been defined, his interest is in breaking the rules to explore evolving organisms that he creates.

**Fred Stitt** will explore the art of the very large in his talk, "Future Technology and Visionary Architecture." In 1991, Stitt founded an experimental graduate school, the San Francisco Institute of Architecture, which is dedicated to freedom and exploration in design education. As such, he is in touch with the visionaries who are refashioning human environments, how they shape society and fit into the ecology. He is author of 12 books and editor/publisher of *Guidelines*, a monthly newsletter for architects.

The forum is free, open to the public and wheelchair accessible.

## Ylem Lecture Program at NASA

Monday, January 27th, 7:30-9 PM  
Special Events Room in the NASA-Ames Visitor Center  
Moffet Field (off Hwy. 101 near Mountain View, CA)  
(Contact: Trudy Myrrh Reagan, (650) 856-9593.)

Talks by NASA scientist Chris McKay and Ylem members Leah Lubin, Mike Mosher and Myrrh.

**Dr. Chris McKay** is a planetary scientist with the Space Science Division of NASA-Ames. His current research focuses on the evolution of the solar system and the origin of life. He is currently involved in studies of Mars using data from the Pathfinder Rover mission and soon, from the Mars Global Surveyor. He has traveled to Antarctic dry valleys, Siberia and the Canadian Arctic to conduct research in these Mars-like environments.

Artists **Leah Lubin**, **Mike Mosher** and **Myrrh** will give short talks on the theme of their exhibit "An Uninhibited View of Space Science" at the Visitor Center entrance, which also includes Minnesota artist Colette Gaither. The program is free, open to the public and wheelchair accessible.

**Robert Stanley** of Des Plaines has been announced as the winner of the Prix de la Ville de Vichy. This award carries with it a one person exhibition at the Fifth Triennial at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chamalieres, France... **Lief Brush** was in the cyber-centered exhibition "ENDEAVOR: I ask you" in December which included soundscape and acoustic ecology-based seminars... **Michael Wright** was one of thirteen artists chosen nationwide for a digital exhibition called "Bodies in Motion" at the Kellogg University Gallery of California State Polytechnic University Pomona in November. This exhibition featured artists who demonstrate a variety of visual research dealing with human locomotion and moving forms using video and computer technologies. Wright created a realtime video using video and computer technologies, working with the University dance troupe choreographed by Cal Poly professor Gayle Fekete... **Reed Altemus** has added to his comprehensive bibliography of copier art new materials from US, Canada, the UK, Hungary, Austria and Köln, Germany. Access it at <http://www-mitpress.mit.edu/Leonardo/isast/spec.projects/electrobib.html>... **Cliff Pickover** recently published a novel with highly-acclaimed author Piers Anthony. The book, *Spider Legs* (TOR, 1998), is an ecological thriller. Strange things are born in the ocean's depths... The "ultimate crustacean encounter."

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Deadline March 1st, 1998

### Ylem Exhibit: Artists Confronting Technology

A joint show by Ylem and the South Bay Chapter of the Women's Caucus for Art will be juried by Stephen Wilson of San Francisco State University and Jan Rindfleisch of De Anza College, Cupertino, CA.

Share your bliss, share your frustrations about technology! Entries should relate to the theme. Both fine arts and electronic arts by any member from either group will be eligible. Send 5 slides or proposal with supporting materials, SASE. Note: Gallery is small. Those accepted will be requested to help in either installing the show or sitting the gallery Sundays 12-4 pm.

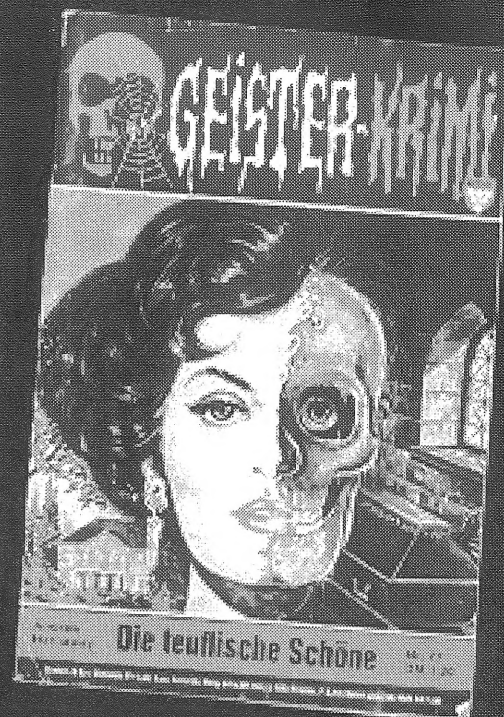
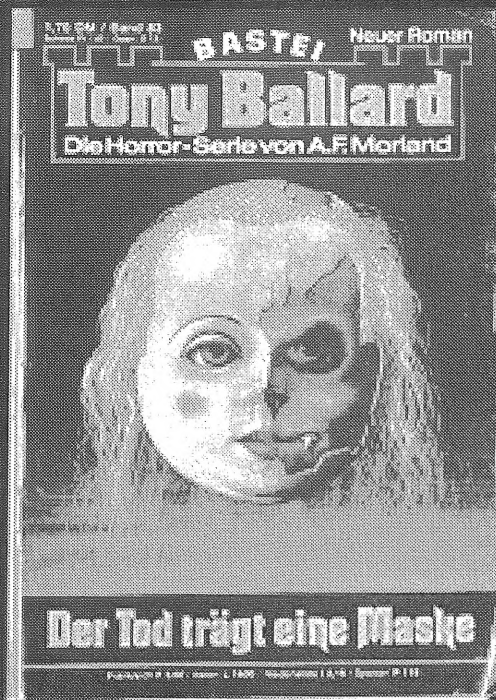
Address any questions to Director Nancy Gordon, 650 493-9400. Koret Gallery, Jewish Community Center, 655 Arastradero Rd., Palo Alto, CA 94306; 650 493-9400. Calendar: Slide deadline, 3/1; Deliver work on 4/14, 11-3 pm; Show runs 4/19 to 5/17; Reception on 4/19; Pick-up work on 5/19 or 20.

### New Ylem Exhibits Policy

All shows called "Ylem Exhibits" will have an open call for entries. Themes and media will vary, to give as many members as possible a chance to participate.

Other shows of Ylem members will be simply "Exhibits with Ylem members."





BELIEF SKEPTIC  
med/sci horror seduction/addiction  
Techno Fears animal/veget terror  
EYE-O-MOUTH

From the collection *Gory Allegories*, 1989. Minnette Lehmann.

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## My Brief Encounter with Philip K. Dick in Berkeley 1949–50

by Minnette Lehmann

As a young, smart bourgeois recently arrived in Berkeley from provincial Sacramento I was keen to lose my inhibitions and my virginity. Diaphragms and penicillin increased my choice, but I fell for a beautiful blonde, Bob Martinson, and married both him and the Marxist/Trotskyite study group which convened at Jack London's daughter's house in Oakland to learn the tactics of worker infiltration in the bayside factories for a future socialist society. For my part, I packed tomatoes at the Del Monte factory on Ashby and San Pablo, but I couldn't handle it. I fainted while I sorted near the moving belt of never-ending tomatoes.

Student Marxism, the rebellion of choice, was my chance to go beyond the confines of The Valley's reactionary ethos. Idealists at that time abhorred the ever-increasing wealth of the middle class, its rush to suburbia, its two cars in every garage, and its fascination with TV's unlimited media-produced leisure time.

Personally, I took off my clothes and became an art model for the art schools at UC Berkeley, CCAC, and The California School of Fine Arts in SF, all of which were full of guys who studied on the GI Bill. On the side I studied classical piano, listened to chamber music on 78s every night after dinner, and hitchhiked to Mills College concerts to hear the latest from Darius Milhaud. On Fridays the film makers Jordan and Maya Belson and Bob and I regularly took the F Train across the bridge to the San Francisco Museum to see experimental Art in Cinema films. Then we went to Tosca's Bar in North Beach to join heated discussions with Pete Martin about drugs, cool cats and the pitfalls and promise of mass society. We helped start City Lights bookstore, which was meant to sell cheap paperback books in order to educate the masses.

After leaving Martinson and the Trotskyites, I studied literature with lovers like Ben Rosenbluth, who was then a Lawrenceian, and Leo Levy, then a Henry James scholar. Enchanted by Jim Herndon, I became part of



# Hankwitz: Beyond Sci-Fi's Bombast

From Page 1

blacks—into a movie theater and exterminate them with gas)). What, then, we questioned, could artists and scientists do by looking beyond sci-fi's bombastic narratives?

Upon this ground I created this issue for YLEM. The three previously published essays found herein were presented as part of the symposium. Minnette Lehmann's thoughtful and witty memoir speaks not only to the fecundity of the intellectual milieu which fed and fueled the genius of Philip K. Dick, but addresses the subjects of fear and death, while both Patrick Macius, as a science fiction scholar and enthusiast, and Laura Brun, speaking from a subject-position of someone deeply involved in the artistic community, bring to light substantial thought in literature and potential revisionist philosophies.

If there is hope for the human race it doesn't lie, from my perspective, in namby-pamby New Age mysticism. As Barbara Kruger pointed out in recent work in the NY transit system, "life is not a spectacle." There

are a host of current human horrors. What we need to ask of ourselves is "what is the role of culture?" Because out there is waste and destruction. Out there is increased backlash against the cultural Other: children, youth, women, people of color and their increased education and human rights. Out there is censorship and political repression. Out there is uncured disease, poverty, affliction, moral and political apathy and passivity. Out there is suburban decay, increased dependency on handguns and tranquilizers to make it through the day, increased violence in homes and schools. There are one hundred and one arguments for human action, if you stop to think. We are human. We do not need moralistic humanism in order to understand that we are. What we may need, however, is to interpret the spectacle as it occurs, and understand the consciousness of our time.

*Ms. Hankwitz is a San Francisco-based writer and artist whose work has recently appeared in the anthology *Architecture and Feminism* (Yale Publications/Princeton Architectural Press, 1997). She is currently at work on new pieces of feminist and philosophical fiction.*

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the adoring circle around the Surrealist poet Jack Spicer. That was the way a girl got an education then. Having inherited the European tradition by winning the war, we also inherited the current existential maxims, but we were ambitiously driven to write *The Great American Novel*. We also traveled Europe as if we owned it.

Little did we know then that *The Great American Novel* would not come from a European source, but rather from the local community by way of pulp fiction, science fiction and the comic book aesthetic of Philip K. Dick. For me, Philip K. Dick was just one of a long list of casual passing investigations. We met late one night at Larry Blake's restaurant after a Budapest String Quartet concert. Dick worked at a record store on Telegraph. I was amused that he preferred to listen to recordings rather than live music. Most of the guys—and before feminism, I misguidedly thought of myself then as one of the guys—had just been released from the armed services. Returning from that horror, the necessary and then current display of alienation was couched in the ambiance of being expatriated; without a homeland. None of us identified with the new spoils-of-war consumer society. But Dick was too young to have been in the army during WW2. Furthermore, he was not engaged with the idea of being an expatriate. The concept wasn't enough for him. He imagined himself as both down-home and extraterrestrial.

Phil and I connected as we talked about death. Phil had a twin sister who had died before he was a year old and I had a brother who died a year before my birth. Also, we had both just read Franz Kafka and we picked up on the same detail. Young Franz had suffered the death of two younger siblings before he was two years old. These dead infants haunted him. Later they could be found bouncing around in his novels just like Dick's sister would later appear in his novels.

Sadly, since Phil and I were the same age, he felt too young for me. He just wasn't as sophisticated as the other guys who had been in the war, so we passed in the night.

We would never meet again. It wasn't till at least 25 years later, and after Phil had died, that I began to read and appreciate Dick's novels. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* was the first of many. Still later Dick's work inspired and hovered around my collages of uncanny manifestations of danger and death in the family. By that time I had had three children and an

*Enjoy the  
unexpected  
kindness of  
astrology...*

# Lehmann: Comic Book Culture

From Page 4

analysis, was married to a devoted Freudian psychoanalyst, and was teaching and doing photography at SF State. This trajectory did not lead to any belief in a unified persona, no single identity. I was determined to be as many of me as possible, and without guilt.

In my work with the early discourse of boys, *Gory Allegories*, I was fascinated with the culture of comic books. I was intrigued with their codes of heroism and I was particularly struck by their need to break with any kind of motherly attachment. The seemingly universal baselines of morality taken from folklore, Greek mythology, the Bible, medieval legends, and local horror stories constitute for the young boy a level of abstract communication not made for girls. This exchange of comic books has a powerful effect on the construction of masculinity. And since women at the same age (roughly nine years old till late adolescence) do not have this script, they are left to deal with dating, home and birth in their imaginations. Serious concerns about survival and death become, in comic book exchange, another territory for male discourse.

Then, as now, I believe that the religious and tribal identifications we pick up in our early

years hold a power we need to question. At present I am investigating my own Jewish background. The millennium, rootbound in religion, will test the permutations of all religious and primitive beliefs. Hidden in the new idealism of community lurk old notions of what it is to be human. My fear is that already established religious institutions will use this hot idealism for their own power. Dick, in his mad way, wrote about this conflict of the raw alienated American West with its longing to believe, its dimly inherited Kultur, and its position on the edge of the world. In fact, late in his life, he fell painfully into belief.

Now increasingly aware of the limits of scientific Enlightenment, we enjoy an imaginative freedom of speculative magic and universal happenings, even as provided by mass entertainment. But, even as we become adept in analyzing popular media, if we fail to distinguish between entertainment and politics, we might well be overcome by the power of corporate technology.

Minnette Lehmann, a San Francisco artist and photo professor at SF State for 20 years, performed with Linda Montano at the second Incident at London's ICA in 1996. Her recent digital collage work will appear in the book *The Art of the X-Files*, forthcoming. She is on the curatorial board at The LAB.

From the collection *Gory Allegories*, 1989. Minnette Lehmann.



# Ylem Calendar

Some calendar items are reprinted from *Art Calendar* (the monthly marketing and career management journal for artists, PO Box 199, Upper Fairmount, MD 21867. Subscriptions, \$32 p. year), *Wired*, *Multimedia Reporter* (from North Bay Multimedia Assn.), *Artweek*, *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, *Artswire* (<[www.artswire.org](http://www.artswire.org)>), *ArtTech* (<[artstech@thecity.sfsu.edu](mailto:artstech@thecity.sfsu.edu)>) and *FineArts Forum Online* (<[paul\\_brown@siggraph.org](mailto:paul_brown@siggraph.org)>). We cannot verify all information sent to us. Readers, inform us of incorrect information, please.

All events and exhibits are in the San Francisco Bay Area except where noted.

We want your announcements! To assure they appear in the next newsletter, send 6 weeks before publication date. Also send notices to the Ylem website where they can appear on shorter notice. (Addresses on back cover.)

Ylem Forums are held the second Wednesday of January, March, May, July, September and November (odd-numbered months) at the Exploratorium, 7:30 pm.

## Events

January 14, 7:30 pm  
**Ylem Forum: Nano and Mega Design**  
*Details on page 2.*

January 27, 7:30-9 pm  
**Ylem Lecture Program at NASA-Ames**  
*Talks by a NASA scientist and 3 artists. Details on page 2.*

## Exhibits

Through March 14  
**Artists' Uninhibited View of Space Science**  
Includes work by Ylem members Leah Lubin, Mike Mosher and Myrrh.  
*Open 8 am-4:30 pm weekdays. Visitor Center, NASA-Ames Visitor Center, Moffett Field, CA*

## Opportunities

Deadline March 1  
**Ylem Exhibit: Artists Confronting Technology**  
*Open call for entries by members. Details on page 2.*

Deadline May 1  
**Brainwash Movies Festival**  
Films less than 13 min. long, transferred to VHS. \$15 entry fee. Prizes, possibility of broadcast afterwards.  
*Contest rules info: Shelby Toland, PO Box 881911, San Francisco, CA 94188; <[www.laughingsquid.com/brainwash](http://www.laughingsquid.com/brainwash)>*

Deadline January 31, 1998  
**Musical Cognition And Behavior: Relevance For Music Composing.**  
**May 28-30, 1998**

Society For The Cognitive Sciences Of Music, Econa Interuniversity Centre For The Research On Cognitive Processing In Natural And Artificial Systems At The University Of Rome la Sapienza, Aula Magna Symposium.

Invited lectures: Rita Aiello (New York); Jamshed J. Bharucha (Hanover, N.H.); Helga de la Motte (Berlin); Irhne Delihge (Bruxelles); Michel Imberty (Paris); Carol Krumhansl (Ithaca); Giovanni B. Vicario (Padova). Internationally known composers of contemporary music are invited.

Special events: 2 concerts of contemporary music. Call for papers: Three types of sessions are scheduled: reading sessions (20 minutes presentation and 5 minutes discussion), poster sessions, demonstrations (25 minutes oral and musical presentation). Cognitive scientists and composers are invited to submit abstracts directly to the organizer:

*Prof. Marta Olivetti Belardinelli; ECONA c/o Dipartimento di Psicologia; via dei Marsi 78, I 00185 Roma. Fax: 0039-6-4462449, Tel: 0039-6-49917533. e-mail: <[belarditecona@iol.it](mailto:belarditecona@iol.it)>*

## CD-ROM Anthology

The International Computer Music Association is seeking innovative intermedia works for inclusion on a CD-ROM anthology. The CD-ROM will be distributed by the ICMA and guest-curated by composer/sound artist Brenda Hutchinson in collaboration with ICMA Recordings Coordinator Larry Polansky. Please send CDs of submitted works to:  
*Larry Polansky, ICMA Recordings Coordinator; Department of Music, Dartmouth College; Hanover, NH 03755. <<http://music.dartmouth.edu/~icma>>*

## U-Turn Art & Tech Issue

U-Turn Monograph Series, an annual art publication founded in the early 1980's by James Hugunin has now established a website at <<http://www.uturn.org>> with excerpts of current and back issues open for browsing. In addition, an e-zine version of U-Turn is planned for 1998. The initial issue will critically examine "art and new technologies" (computers, VR, interactive systems, electronic art, etc.).



If you have an interest in contributing to this topic with a critical/scholarly essay or with visual material pertaining to this theme (we plan on utilizing URL hyperlinks to pertinent material as well), please send e-mail inquiries to James Hugunin at: <lander4@uinet.campus.mci.net>

James R. Hugunin, 2171 W. Giddings #2; Chicago, IL 60625, USA Tel: +1 312-561-8039

### **YLEM at the Mining Company**

Art & Technology <<http://arttech.miningco.com/>> is looking for artists & writers to participate with essays, features, and are open to suggestions.

Contact Ted Warnell:  
<ted.warnell@bbs.logicnet.com>

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### **Webgrrls Networking Organization**

The San Francisco chapter is huge. Webgrrls members meet once a month in SF to network and exchange information, business leads and ideas and to hear incredible speakers. SF Webgrrls Workshops are held twice monthly. Workshop topics include: Programming in PERL, What Every Webgrrl Needs to Know about Intellectual Property, UNIX for Beginners, Intro to HTML and many, many more.

For more information about Webgrrls, San Francisco:  
<<http://www.webgrrls.com/sf>>  
Susan Quinn, tel. 415-677-9924 or 415-905-5959. Mail to: <[susan@wordcasters.com](mailto:susan@wordcasters.com)>

### **First International Conference On Virtual Worlds '98**

International Multimedia Institute, Paris, 1st-3rd July 1998

See last issue for full details, or browse <<http://www.devinci.fr/home/iim/vw98/vw98.htm>>

### **FineArt Forum**

FineArt Forum is the newsletter of the Art, Science and Technology Network produced in Brisbane, Australia in cooperation with the Department of Communication Design at the Queensland University of Technology. It includes: a hyperlinked version of the monthly newsletter, a monthly update of new art web sites, the recently relaunched "Reviews" section, a permanent and substantial listing of other art resources on the Internet moderated and maintained by Jeliza Patterson and a gallery section.

FineArt Forum URL:  
<[http://www.msstate.edu/Fineart\\_Online/](http://www.msstate.edu/Fineart_Online/)>

### **Call for Submissions**

Michele Emmer, guest editor of a special issue of "Shape modeling" by World Scientific is asking for papers that can give new ideas to people working in modeling, morphology, and design. The deadline is 6-8 months. Selected materials will be published.

Prof. Michele Emmer;  
Universite degli Studi di Roma  
"La Sapienza"; Dipartimento di Matematica; Piazzale A. Moro; I-00185 Roma; Italy.  
Tel: +39 6 4991.3279 or +39

6 8862203. Fax: +39 6 44701007 or +39 6 8862203. <[emmer@mat.uniroma1.it](mailto:emmer@mat.uniroma1.it)>, <[m.emmer@iol.it](mailto:m.emmer@iol.it)>

### **Leonardo Digital Reviews**

Leonardo Digital Reviews is a review journal published regularly as a section of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac. Leonardo Digital Reviews covers publications, conferences, events and publicly presented performances and exhibits. The focus is the work of artists, scientists, technologists and scholars dealing with the interaction of the arts, sciences and technology. Topics covered include the work of visual artists, composers and multimedia artists using new media and technologies in their work, artists dealing with issues and concepts from contemporary science, the cultural dimensions of science and technology and the work of scholars and historians in related fields. Specifically, they publish, reviews of publications in electronic formats (CD, CDROM, CDI), on-line, diskette, WWW, and reviews of print publications, events, conferences, and exhibits dealing with art, science and technology.

Accepted reviews will be published in *Leonardo Digital Reviews*. Reviews of key works will also be considered for publication in the *Leonardo Journal* and *Leonardo Music Journal* published in print by MIT Press. Selected reviews will also be republished in the *Leonardo Almanac* book published by the MIT Press.

Authors, artists and others interested in having their (physical) publications considered for review in *Leonardo Digital Reviews* should mail a copy of the publication to Leonardo; 236 West Portal Ave, #781; San Francisco, CA 94127; USA. Event and exhibit organizers, and authors of virtual/electronic publications and events interested in having their event reviewed should send information in advance electronically (only) to: <[davinci@uclink.berkeley.edu](mailto:davinci@uclink.berkeley.edu)>

### **Needs & Offerings**

Feb. 1

#### **PUBLICITY FOR ARTISTS.**

Three-hour informal lecture and workshop at ATA taught by Molly Hankwitz. Learn to write press releases and do creative publicity. \$20.00 open enrollment limited to 10 students. Handouts, etc. Sunday Feb. 1, 5:30 to 8:30. call for info. (415) 824-3890.

ATA, 992 Valencia/21st.; S.F., CA 94110.

### **Intelligent Agent Magazine**

*Intelligent Agent*, quarterly magazine, features diverse commentary on the use of new media in arts and education. IA is a print resource for information about interactive art and education. IA provides timely information, reviews of Web sites, CD-ROMS and other media in addition to announcements and calls for participation. It also provides interesting Bookmarks for web sites. *Intelligent Agent* also has a Web Site that features reviews, time-based materials, and the FYI section.

To subscribe to Intelligent Agent Magazine: (+1) 212-462-9033; 1-888-64AGENT. E-mail: <hyperact@interport.net> or write to Hyperactive Corporation, P.O. Box 661, New York, NY 10012. Christiane Paul, editor, Intelligent Agent. <<http://intelligent-agent.com>>

### Try Macromedia's new Web tool!

Recently we introduced Dreamweaver, which will give you the productivity of a visual Web page layout tool, the control of an HTML text editor, and support for

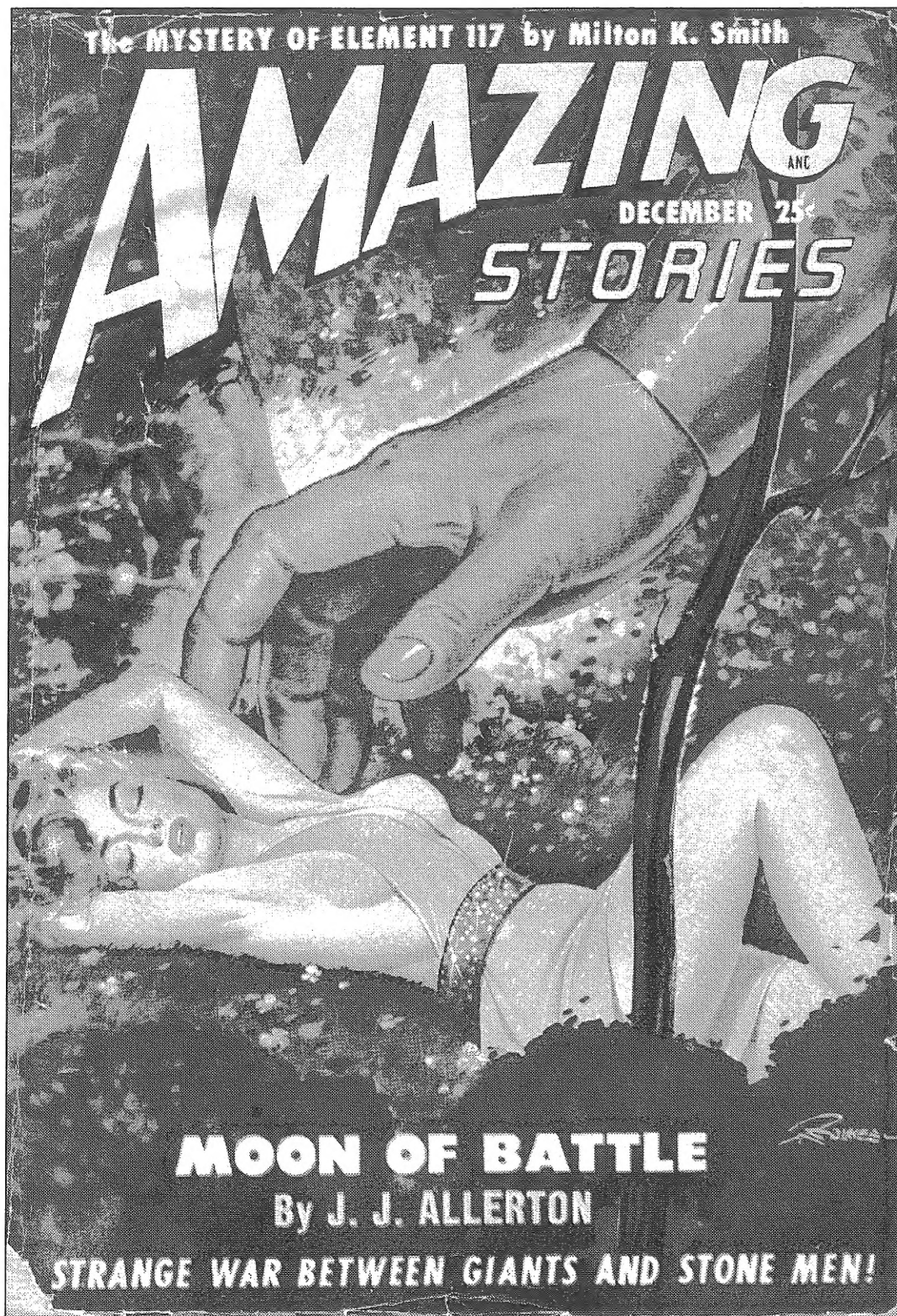
Dynamic HTML all in one professional package. Download and try a FREE Beta of Dreamweaver today: <<http://www.macromedia.com/software/dreamweaver>>

### An Addition To the Skyline of Electronic Arts

The Center for Art and Media Technology, in Karlsruhe, Germany, will open its doors on as one of the best examples to date of art institutions working to keep up with electronic culture. Called the ZKM, short for Zentrum fur Kunst and Medientechnologie, its 1918 structure has been "completely reconfigured, renovated, wired and equipped to provide acreage for their substantial and still growing collections of electronic art, multimedia displays and virtual-reality installations." This huge facility also contains "extensive research facilities, a design school and a multimedia library."

"What is special is that ZKM tries to put new art into a context and a history. It is a brave and bold move, and I think it will influence many people to move in this direction," said interactive artist Lynn Hershman.

Author: Matthew Mirapaul. <<http://www.nytimes.com/library/cyber/mirapaul/101697mirapaul.html>>





# The Ylem Annual Directory

The "Artists Using Science and Technology Directory" is a handsomely produced publication describing nearly 250 artists' fascinating specialties. It is abundantly illustrated. Collectors, curators, art critics, educators and libraries all use it as a resource. Production is paid for with picture fees. One year membership fee includes a copy of the edition of the Directory in which you are listed.

For the first time, Ylem will publish an online version on the Internet. Please read directions carefully.

*To be listed in the printed and/or online Directory, you must be a member of Ylem or join or renew by October 31.*

## PRINTED VERSION INSTRUCTIONS

You may submit either a printed PHOTO or a DIGITAL FILE.

**DIGITAL FILE:** TIFF or PICT format on 3.5" disk.

**PHOTO:** Securely attach the following information to the back of your original, and read the fine print below:

- Your name
- Caption for picture as it will appear: (Title, medium, date, dimensions, description if any)
- Arrow indicating top of image.
- Picture Fee:
  - \$25 for 1/4 page
  - \$50 for 1/2 page
  - \$90 for full page

*Picture fees are in addition to membership dues.*
- Membership fee (if appropriate)
- Enclosed S.A.S.E. (if return of image desired)
- Completed form (see next column)

## ONLINE VERSION INSTRUCTIONS

Submit your color image in GIF or JPEG format on 3.5" disk. Include caption, etc., in text-only or ASCII format. And see checklist above!

- Listing in ONLINE VERSION: Send \$25
- Listing in BOTH versions: Send \$15 EXTRA.

### THE FINE PRINT—FOR PHOTOS

1. The printed Directory is a black and white publication. Images with good contrast and sharp focus are necessary. Please do not send color pictures or ones that have been screened.
2. We will do our best to scale the pictures to the area purchased, but due to the dimensions of the page, it may have to be scaled smaller if the picture is too narrow, vertically or horizontally.
3. If the art does not fill the picture area, we reserve the right to crop it.

## Ylem Directory Form

To be pictured in the Directory, please fill out this form and send with your submission materials by **October 31st, 1998.**

### Yearly Membership rates

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# Pop Cosmologies in Millenium Culture

by Laura Brun

As a child, the first book I remember borrowing from the library was about Greek mythology—though raised a Catholic, I was enthralled by the stories of Zeus and Hera, Apollo, Athena and Artemis and the rest of the Olympic pantheon. The Catholic Holy Trinity and the Greek Gods existed simultaneously in my personal cosmology. As an artist today, I look at cultural myths, popular icons, narratives and images, to examine their meaning in regard to our current socio-political climate.

As the new millennium approaches, we appear to be walking the line between cynicism about the future of our world and optimism about a future which belongs to us. While our collective belief in the possibility of change is fueled by our anticipated celebration of the passage of time, we are numbed by social injustice, loss of life to AIDS, poverty and crime, environmental disaster, the collapse of the nuclear family, and more. In view of the future, many of us feel a sense of individual urgency to evaluate and redefine the meaning of our life trajectories, our goals and ambitions, needs and desires. New philosophy is needed; but we are often too tired to generate it, trapped in a post-postmodern tape loop of repetitive history, a mass cultural migraine headache perpetuated by widespread and seemingly entropic ignorance, apathy and hope.

New spiritual belief systems are permeating the cultural atmosphere. Daytime talk shows, the Internet, sensational tabloids, and psychic telephone networks are seething with self-help gurus, guardian angels, benevolent and malevolent extraterrestrial beings, and first-person testimonials documenting close encounters of every variety. This emerging iconography invites us to reconfigure a chaotic world.

In the Hollywood blockbuster *Independence Day*, evil aliens invade Earth and attempt to wipe out humankind and take over the planet. These malevolent beings are more powerful than us because their advanced technology surpasses ours. The threat they pose causes all nations to unite in an effort to save the planet for humanity. A new world order is created. In this scenario, international unity is accomplished through the appearance of a common

enemy. Ironically, though humanity is united at last, the Us vs. The mentality of war is recreated on a larger, intergalactic scale. In this pro-military cosmology, the technology of war is an evil necessity. The latest Hollywood blockbusters, *Starship Troopers* and *Alien Resurrection*, are similar variations on the theme: humanity is threatened by alien invasion; the people of the world unite to stamp out the alien

monsters. Again, the technology of war is vindicated, and the end justifies the means.

These and other Hollywood products borrow a lot from current popular folklore regarding The Grays, an evil alien race incapable of love or emotion. The lore of The Grays is complex—in short, they are the bad guys who have been mutilating our cattle and abducting us for scientific experiments involving bizarre breeding programs, among other things. The popular television series *The X-Files* is primarily based on Gray Alien lore. Scripts suggest government involvement with the aliens, and that our leaders have been cooperating with them by allowing them to conduct experiments on humans in exchange for the new technologies they have given us.

In all of these popular cosmologies, technology and humanistic values are repositioned in relation to the necessity for our species to survive. We are victimized by equally omniscient alien invaders or political leaders, who watch us with Big Brother technology in order to control and use us for mysterious purposes that we do not understand. It is a cosmology that reinforces our collective angst, the cultural paradigm of victimization and our sense of helplessness to prevent war, environmental destruction, AIDS, crime, poverty, etc. It is a cosmology of blame, which encourages us to reject accountability for our collective fate.

Do we simply receive mythic narratives and images, or can we also co-create them as artists, or consumers, or both? Have we left our creative visions and utopian desires in the hands of the media? As artists we are in the business of creating our own cosmologies. What kinds of myths inspire and empower us?

Brun: Page 11

# Brun: Popular New Cosmologies

From Page 10

A 1994 book by Berkeley author Bob Frissell is aptly titled *Nothing in this Book is True But It's Exactly How Things Are*. The title gives us permission to consider the content of the book as fictional or real, depending on the belief threshold of the reader. Either way, this book provides a fascinating overview of some of the wildest New Age beliefs and conspiracy theories, woven together in a strangely logical tapestry. Gray aliens, ascended masters, free energy, cattle mutilations, crop circles, rebirthing, earth changes, the Great Pyramid, and secret colonies on Mars all come into play in this unconventional account of our planetary ascent into higher consciousness as guided by ascended masters, or spiritual guides, from the 13th dimension. According to this account, "The speed at which our Earth consciousness is evolving is unheard of in the universe, and many galactic presences are now gathered around our planet, watching us and waiting, to observe the exciting, unprecedented event of our human evolution into unity consciousness, which will cause our planet to shift into a new dimensional level."

Unity consciousness is described here as the experience of a fourth dimensional reality in which "we will no longer experience ourselves as separate beings but as different

aspects of a

whole being—as different cells in one body."

It is experienced as the "full awareness of our intimate connection with all life everywhere."

We must consider this concept of unity consciousness in view of the current concerns of political activists, environmentalists, cultural theorists, Hollywood, and the general public about existing and potential social and ecological catastrophe, and planetary survival.

\* \* \*

Whether these ideas are received as myth or reality is irrelevant to any discussion of their use value as signs of the times, particularly in regard to the zeitgeist forming in anticipation of the coming millennium. What is the ultimate effect of these popular new cosmologies? What difference does it make in our lives? Perhaps the most useful idea offered in Bob Frissell's book is the idea that "we are all masters here to co-create heaven on Earth." Essentially, it is suggested that we

all need to wake up and become cognizant of the fact that we are integral parts of One Spirit that pervades all life in the Universe, and therefore each equally responsible for the creation of our collective future reality. In particular, this awareness is supposed to involve a shift from "victim consciousness into mastery of divine expression"—conscious, creative expression that will ultimately transform our world.

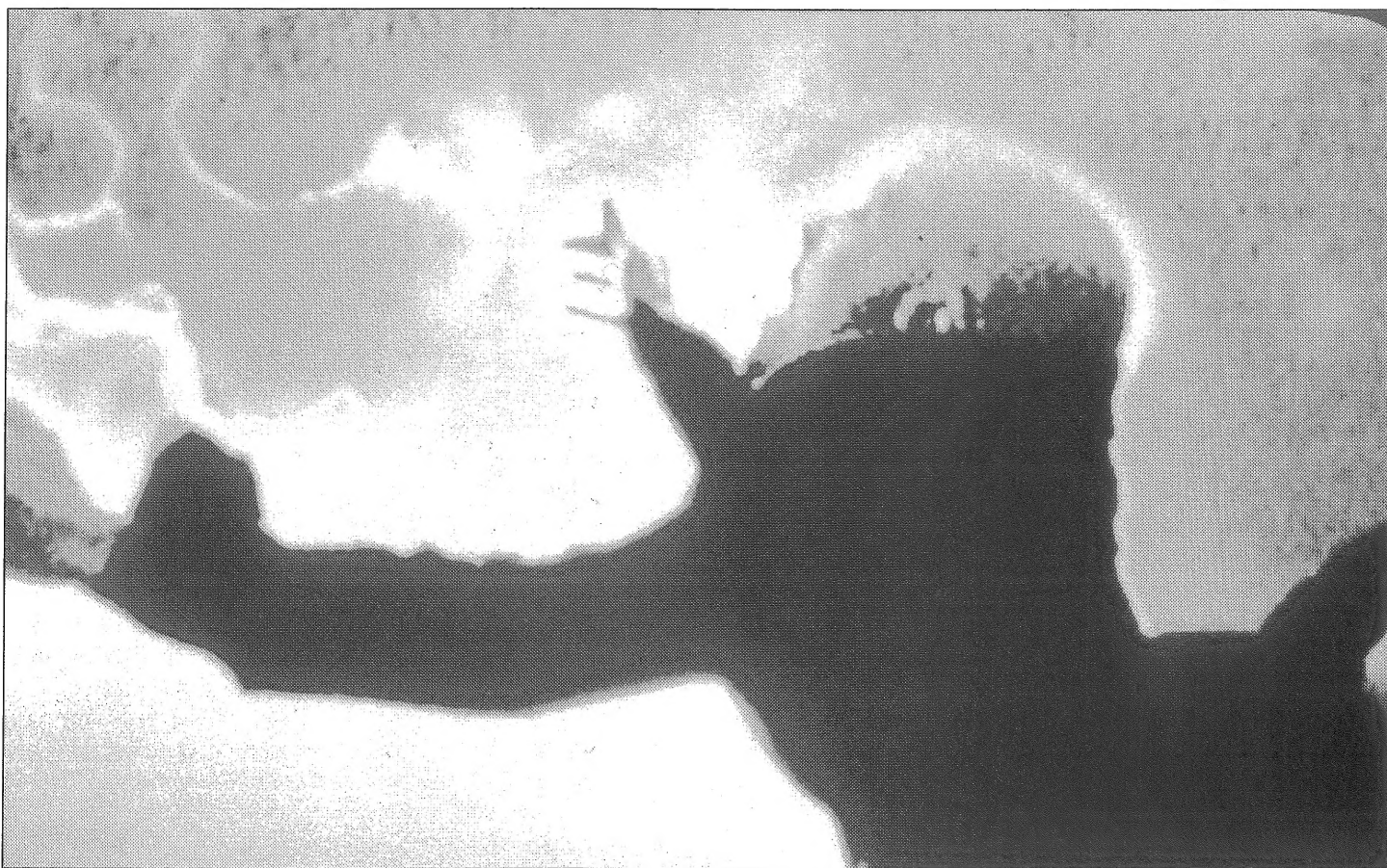
For all of us peace-lovers who dream of a happier world, is this cosmology not infinitely preferable to the currently dominant cosmology in which we are all hapless, disempowered pawns subjected to the merciless machinations of evil earthbound political or extraterrestrial superpowers over whom we have no control? Could we actually be conscious individuals collectively taking responsibility to co-create heaven on earth? What cosmology would you choose as a representation of Utopia?

Aren't we all simultaneously the makers and the consumers of our own cosmologies?

*Powder* (1995) is a recent low-budget film that depicts an alternative cosmology similar to that offered in *Nothing In This Book Is True But It's Exactly How Things Are*. It offers a world view that posits humanity in a state of crisis, and depicts a society where each individual is to blame for their own suffering, and responsible for their own fate.

*Powder* is an unusual teenager whose mother has died during childbirth after being struck by lightning. *Powder* survives in her womb and is born without pigmentation—an albino with extraordinary intelligence and supernatural gifts. He's a human lighting rod who attracts electricity to his body, creating electrical disturbances wherever he goes, i.e., by flickering lights, exploding TVs, etc. He uses his miraculous powers, controlled telekinetic and psychic abilities, for benevolent purposes such as bringing dying people back to life, or resolving interpersonal conflicts through telepathic communication.

The movie is set in a small mid-western town that could be Anywhere, USA. *Powder*'s high school science teacher is played here by Jeff Goldblum—Hollywood's favorite typecast of a mystic science guy. In a great example of trickle-down pop culture physics, Goldblum's character informs us that "Einstein believed in life after death because energy can never cease to exist, because it relays the transformers and doesn't stop ever," and, "if we ever got to



Powder is transported by lightning.

the point that we could use all of our brain that we'd be pure energy and we wouldn't even need bodies... Powder is closer to that energy level than any body has ever been." He has "a mind that we want to evolve to... he is the man of the future."

Ultimately, Powder is a Christ-like figure that society cannot accept or understand. The potential value of his miracle working and consciousness raising is made abundantly clear in the movie. But the townspeople for the most part have lost their humanity. They are lost in and confused by a dismal and banal cosmology where so-called Christian values are a shallow hypocrisy. The petty cruelties they inflict upon him due to their prejudice and disbelief ultimately cause him to choose to return home to the heavens, transported by lightning which in this film is described as the White Fire of God. His arrival to Earth and departure from it are equally premature, due to the ignorance and neglect of the community which must come to terms with him.

In this film, technology is not to blame for our earthly misfortunes, nor is the government, or the Gray aliens, or any other external victimizing agents of destruction. The fate of humanity is dependent upon and begins with individuals, their beliefs, and their actions.

Powder's message is simply that "Everyone has a feeling of being separate—and they're not—they're part of every living thing."

In a postscript of hope, the science teacher tells Powder upon his departure, "It's become appallingly clear that technology has surpassed humanity—I look at you and I think that someday, our humanity might actually surpass our technology."

Meanwhile, on the news, astronaut Shannon Lucid and the crew of the space shuttle Atlantis send a message from space: they tell the kids on earth, if you want to be an astronaut, go out for sports, play baseball and football, because everything we do up here in space is a team effort—we have to work together to survive."

*Laura Brun was co-founder of The LAB, an alternative artspace in San Francisco in 1984, and is currently The LAB's Artistic Director. Her own multi-media performance and installation art has been presented at numerous Bay Area and national art venues since 1986.*



# Science Fiction Literature and the Realm of the Spirit

by Patrick Macias

SCIENCE FICTION LITERATURE HAS BEEN AN IMMENSE testing ground for all manner of beliefs and philosophies. One need only look to the legacy of works like Robert Heinlein's *Stranger In a Strange Land* (a book about an alien messiah that Charles Manson notes as a seminal influence) or L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology (which began life in an issue of *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine) to see how powerfully a mix of faith and outright fiction can impact "the real world." Yet in the popular mind, science fiction is still mostly perceived as being concerned with space, now both literal and cyber. Some great works that attempt to chart progress in a spiritual and evolutionary sense have been neglected at a moment in human history when they might be needed most.

Two authors from the past, Cordwainer Smith and Olaf Stapledon, composed long fugue-like cosmologies spanning millennia in the future of our species. Along with the expected marvels of space travel and super-science comes a preoccupation with God and how the future will change the relationship between God, humans, and the universe they inhabit.

13 Cordwainer Smith wrote a story cycle known as *The Instrumentality of Mankind*. Possessed with one of the most fertile imaginations that science fiction has yet produced, Smith told a tale 15 thousand years long, encompassing many different planets, cultures, and creatures. In a voice often resembling bedtime stories told from parent to child, Smith examined immortality, drugs, space travel, interspecies romance, and the human/machine dynamic. The only constant in this ever-evolving and growing cosmology is The Instrumentality itself, an elite and mysterious priesthood that controls the destiny of humankind.

When Smith began writing in the early 1950s, his style was supremely playful and exotic, full of puns and literary allusions. But over the years his stories became passionate pleas for love, the legacy of Smith's own beliefs as a devout Christian. One story, "The Dead Lady of Clown Town" is a re-telling of the Joan of Arc legend. Here, Joan is half-dog/half-girl, leading a race of intelligent animals called the Underpeople into revolt against the Instrumentality who has made them slaves. Smith writes, "Joan began to sing in a soft protesting dog like wail, using the off-key plainsong which the Underpeople had used just before their hour of decision... Her words were nothing special, repetitions of the 'people, dear people, I love you.' The way she did it has defied imitation across the centuries. There are thousands of lyrics and melodies which call themselves, one way or another, 'The Song of Joan', but none of them come near to the heart-wrenching pathos of the original tapes."

In the way that Smith's later stories deal with the timelessness of faith in God, they are the closest thing we have to religious fables of the future. The word Instrumentality itself is found in Roman Catholic and Episcopalian theology, where the priest performing the sacraments is the 'Instrumentality' of God himself. Scattered throughout Smith's 32 short stories and one novel, there are tantalizing hints of an ultimate and divine destination for the worlds he set in motion. Smith, who also wrote a definitive military text on psychological warfare, sadly died before the saga was completed.

If Smith's stories were like fables, then the works of English writer Olaf Stapledon read like scripture. He spoke of his own writing, much of it accomplished before World War II, as "creation myths in essay." His first major novel is *Last and First Men* and it follows the future of humanity from the end of WWI to 2 billion years in the future. What occurs is the painfully slow development of man on Earth, then a forced migration to Venus when the planet dies. With a new civilization erected on Neptune, a final state of maturity is entered; man is practically a God, possessing an omnipotent group mind of both human and astronomical dimensions. When a supernova explosion threatens to wipe out the race, the Last Men seed the galaxy with artificial life spores. Stapledon writes, "The Scattering of the Seed has come to be for every one of us the supreme religious duty. Even those who continually sin against it recognize this as the last office of man. It was for this that we outstayed our time, and we must watch ourselves decline from spiritual estate into that brutishness from which man has seldom freed himself." Stapledon believes that failure resides in the body and animal mind. Without biological change, true community and utopia is impossible.

While *Last and First Men* charts 2 billion years in humankind's evolution, Stapledon's other major work, *Starmaker*, charts 500 billion years into the evolution of the entire cosmos. Here man meets the Starmaker, the generative force of the entire universe. But the creator is detached and contemplative, rather than caring and loving. The lesson is that tenderness can only come from life alone, and not its creator.

As we approach 2000 A.D. (a time frame that once belonged solely to science fiction), the questions of 'what to change' and 'what to keep permanent' in our relationship with religion and the Other are of paramount importance. Smith, Stapledon, and the speculative fiction of the past might be one of the best road maps we have to the future.

Patrick Macias is a San Francisco-based writer and lifelong science-fiction enthusiast. He currently writes the "Tiger on Beat" film column for the *SF Bay Guardian*.



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